

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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SMITH URGES PARTICIPATION IN MILLION FATHER MARCH

GARY – An estimated half-million Black men in 125 cities will get their children ready for their first day of school and then accompany the students to the schools in a show of support and encouragement for their children's education. The effort is part of the nationwide Million Father March.

"When fathers take an active interest in their children's education, then those students become more engaged in their academic pursuits," said State Rep. Vernon G. Smith (D-Gary), who is also an education professor at Indiana University-Northwest. "Studies have shown that children, whose fathers take active roles in their sons' and daughters' educations, earn better grades, get higher test scores, enjoy school more, have higher graduation rates, and are much more likely to attend college.

"A strong family structure, with an active, responsible father, helps children develop greater self-confidence which benefits them educationally and allows for greater social development," continued Dr. Smith. "Parental involvement is an empowerment for the African-American community that builds bridges of opportunity for the next generation with advantages that can be seen by the current generation."

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Unemployment and poor educational performance are identified as causes for many of the problems among African-American males who've taken a wrong turn, according to Dr. Smith, who is also the national chairman of the African-American Male National Council. He said he supports the Million Father March because of the event's positive emphasis toward education. Dr. Smith explained that a good education can help reduce unemployment by opening opportunities for young Black men and women and help place them on a positive path toward becoming productive citizens who will help build and uplift their communities.

Dr. Smith encouraged not only fathers to participate in the back-to-school event, but also grandfathers, foster fathers, step-fathers, uncles, cousins, big brothers, significant male caregivers, and friends of the family. He also added the effort should not be limited to the Black community, but that men and women of all races should participate by taking their children to school on the first day.

The "Million Father March" is a "rolling event" since the first day of school varies from school district to school district. The event is sponsored in part by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, the National Council on Educating Black Children and The Black Star Project. For more information, visit the website at www.millionfathermarch.org.

In Lake County, event organizer Courtney Matthews can be e-mailed at msmodesty21@hotmail.com. Elder Felix L. Graham is the organizer for Indianapolis. His e-mail address is felix.graham@fssa.in.gov.

